

June 5, 2016

From the book of Mark, Chapter 8, commencing at verse 22:

²² And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him.

²³ And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought.

²⁴ And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking.

²⁵ After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.

²⁶ And he sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town.

This is a separate, brief and distinct story, tucked in a rather lengthy chapter describing various events during the ministry of Jesus. What we see in this story is a blind man – brought to Jesus by his disciples – who is miraculously healed. This is one of many miracles performed by Jesus described in the New Testament.

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What is unique about this miracle, and what makes it stand “absolutely alone” (according to most expositors) is that it was “done in stages.” [Quotes from MacLaren’s Exposition] While other miracles were done instantly at the mere words of Jesus, this one comes gradually and a bit more slowly.

Specifically, concerning this miracle and its manifestation, we know that a word from our Lord’s mouth or a touch of his hand would have been sufficient to affect a cure. But instead we see Jesus taking this blind man by the hand, leading him out of the town, spitting on his eyes, putting his hands on him, and then, and not until then, restoring his sight.

It is good to recognize, in reading this story, that the Lord is not tied to the use of any one particular method. In the conversion of men’s souls, there are diversities of operation, but it is the same Spirit which converts. So also in the healing of men’s bodies there are varieties of agencies

employed by God Almighty, but it's the same divine power that affects the cure. God is a sovereign, and he is not duty-bound to give us an account as to these matters.

As I have said, there is one thing in this passage that demands our special attention. That thing is the gradual nature of the cure which the Lord performed on this blind man. He did not deliver him from his blindness at once, but by degrees. He obviously could have done it in an instant, but he chose to do it step by step. First the blind man said that he only saw “**men as trees, walking.**” Afterwards, his eyesight was restored completely, and he “**saw every man clearly.**” In this respect, this miracle is unique.

So what is the significance of that unique variation? We need not doubt that this gradual cure was meant to be an emblem of spiritual things and for our learning. Indeed, we may be sure that there is deep meaning in every word and work of our Lord's earthly ministry, some of which we may be fortunate enough to capture.

A fair picture of the Lord's peoples' experiences during their earthly journey ~

Here is one likely lesson; it is comparable to conversion of the Lord's people. Conversion is an illumination, a change from darkness to light, from blindness to seeing the kingdom of God. Yet few (if any) of the Lord's elect – at the time of their calling – see things distinctly at first. The nature and proportion of doctrines, practices and ordinances of the Gospel are dimly seen by them and imperfectly understood. They are like this blind man, who at first saw men as trees walking. He had a general idea of what he was seeing, but for the most part his vision was fuzzy, indistinct and weak. A new sheep's vision is dazzled and unaccustomed to the new world into which he has been introduced, comparable to when we awake from a deep sleep and suddenly enter a bright room. It is not until the work of the Spirit has become deeper and their experience been somewhat matured that God's newly converted people see things more clearly.

This thought is captured at verses such as:

- 1 Peter 2:2 and 3: **As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.**
- And 1 Corinthians 3:2: **I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto you were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.**
- And, finally, Hebrews 5:13-14: **For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.**

This is the history of thousands of God's children over the centuries. They begin with seeing men as trees walking; they end with seeing matters more clearly. Indeed, this miracle of the blind man teaches us that **the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.** (Proverbs 4:18). Clearly, if the path shines more and more brightly leading up to the Time of Perfection, it had to start out dark, dim and hazy – relatively speaking. And when you are progressing down an ever-brighter path, you necessarily become light to others. **That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life; . . .** (Philippians 2:15, 16). Similarly, from Matthew 5:14 – **Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.**

Moreover, we are each different, and at diverse stages of our respective journeys. Some are older; some are younger; some have good verbal skills, some don't; some are creative, some not so much; some of us are deep thinkers and some of us – well – (what can I say) not so much, and so on. As we read in 1 Corinthians 4:7, **For who maketh thee to differ *from another?* and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive *it*, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst**

not received it? But no matter what your current stage on the journey, and your individual uniqueness, you are ever-learning and receiving more and more light as time goes on. It generally happens this way: **For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little(.)** (Isaiah 28:10).

Teaching tools –

Shall we look at some of the methods, mechanisms or tools God Almighty utilizes in accomplishing this education – or great eye-opening – of his people? I submit at least these –

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- A. The church – we know the Lord’s church is **the pillar and ground of the truth.** (1 Timothy 3:15). The best start you can imagine to learning what is actually going on is truth! We know from experience the church is a great teaching place. Scripture confirms it: **And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.** (Acts 11:26).
- B. Scripture – similarly, the written word of God enlightens the eyes of His people, and educates them in a noble way. **The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.** (Psalm 19:8). **For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.** (Romans 15:4).
- C. Experiences/persecutions – the fictional character Tom Sawyer talked of experience when he said “the person that had took a bull by the tail once had learnt sixty or seventy times as much as a person that hadn't, and [] a person that started in to carry a cat home by the tail was getting knowledge that was always going to be useful to him, and warn't ever going to grow dim or doubtful.” The experiences – and especially the persecutions – of the people of God are great instructors. **My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers**

temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. (James 1:2-4). That word “entire” means having all parts or elements, whole, complete, full, thorough, intact, unimpaired and undiminished. Don’t forget, the man in our primary text was ultimately **restored, and saw every man (or thing) clearly.** (Mark 8:25). Ultimately, the sheep of God are rendered “perfect and entire” by this teaching method, and it becomes a trademark of their very being, as we see from this scripture from the Bible’s closing book: **And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.** (Revelation 7:14).

D. Showings – sooner or later (and I say this with considerable glee), the Lord is going to tell his people what the heck is going on. Directly or indirectly, by hook or by crook, the wandering saints of God will not be – and are not – left in the dark about the weighty and major things that are happening on this world’s stage. That is a great comfort, and is something nobody else has any legitimate claim to or expectation of. **And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do[?]** (Genesis 18:17). Thus we happily see that the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him! They have a better insight of the present and a better foresight of what is to come. Hear what Matthew Poole says on this sweet verse: “I will not, cannot hide it; it is against the laws of friendship to conceal my secrets from him.” Precious are those occasions when our Savior says “come here, I’ve got a little secret to share with you” and then proceeds to whisper it in our ears.

E. Elders – if you never read anything but the book of Acts, you would know that one of the first things done when new churches were established was the selection and ordination of elders. For example: **And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.** (Acts 14:23). In the 3rd chapter of 1st Timothy, we are given a listing of the qualifications of an elder, which listing includes the ability to teach. **A bishop then must be blameless, the**

husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach[.] (1 Timothy 3:2). That little word “apt” means inclined, disposed, given, prone or suited to the purpose or occasion. Now, we in this church certainly have experience with various elders who have taught us over the years. Admittedly, some of those elders may seem a bit more “apt” than others, but beauty is in the eye of the beholder and I submit to you that just the right number of elders and just the proper skill or ability to teach is present (or has been present) in each, when taken as a whole *vis-à-vis* their audience. That is to say, the aptitude to teach found in the combined elders of this church at any given time is perfectly suited for her various and diverse members.

F. Fellow elect – stated simply, we learn from each other. Necessarily, that learning requires interaction. **Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.** (Malachi 3:16). An entire Psalm is devoted to this notion, and I refer to Psalm 133: **Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.** The nature of that brotherly interaction contributes to the divine learning experience. **Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another**[.] (Romans 12:10). In this context, scripture takes us back to the “light” metaphor, as we see in 1 John 2:10: **He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.**

G. Creation itself – the final mechanism God employs in teaching and enlightening his chosen people, that I will speak to today, is creation itself. **For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead**[.] (Romans 1:20). Job speaks to this in considerable detail near the end of his back-and-forth with the three bad guys:

But Job answered and said,

²How hast thou helped him that is without power? how savest thou the arm that hath no strength?

³How hast thou counselled him that hath no wisdom? and how hast thou plentifully declared the thing as it is?

⁴To whom hast thou uttered words? and whose spirit came from thee?

⁵Dead things are formed from under the waters, and the inhabitants thereof.

⁶Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering.

⁷He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing.

⁸He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them.

⁹He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it.

¹⁰He hath compassed the waters with bounds, until the day and night come to an end.

¹¹The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at his reproof.

¹²He divideth the sea with his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through the proud.

¹³By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens; his hand hath formed the crooked serpent.

¹⁴Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand? (Job 26).

A fair picture of the Lord's people migrating from this world to the world to come –

Let us also see in the gradual cure of this blind man a striking picture of the present position of Christ's believing people in the world compared with that which is to come. We see in part and know in part in the present dispensation. It's comparable to night travelers; they don't see everything around them and often don't know what's happening in the countryside. In the providential dealings of God with his children, and in the conduct of many of God's saints, we see much that we cannot understand and cannot alter. In short, we are like this man that saw "men as trees walking."

And please note, you can be sure this once blind man was thrilled to be able to see those “trees walking.” Some sight is better than no sight. But even better was when he ultimately and eventually saw “everything clearly.”

Anyone familiar with the Bible can't help but think of 1 Corinthians 13:12 in this context: **For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”**

Not to mention 1 John 3:2 – **Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.**

And Psalm 17:15 is helpful in this context: **As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.**

What about the admonition to keep quiet?

This story about the blind man being made to see ends with Christ sending this favored man away to his house with a strong admonition that he not go into the nearby town nor tell about this miracle to anybody in that town. If you look at the text carefully, it is apparent this admonition of secrecy is not universal, but is limited to that particular town (presumably Bethsaida, as referenced in verse 22) and that town's inhabitants. Again the text says: **Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town.** (Mark 8:26).

Incidentally, you may have noticed one of the first things Jesus did when beginning this miracle of healing the blind man was to lead **him out of the town**. (Mark 8:23).

What is the significance of Jesus removing this man from Bethsaida and then ordering him not to return to that town and not to tell anybody in that town about this miracle?

I believe the answer is best gleaned from Dr. John Gill's comments on this particular verse; other authors on the subject have little (if anything) to say on the matter.

Here is what the good doctor has to say, as only he can say it –

[T]he reason of this was not merely or only because Christ would have the miracle concealed; but chiefly because the inhabitants of this place were notorious for their impenitence and unbelief. Christ had done many wonderful works among them and yet they repented not; nor did they believe in him; but despised him, his doctrine and his miracles; and therefore for their neglect and contempt of such means he was determined to withdraw them from them. So Christ sometimes deals with nations, cities and towns that disbelieve, reject and despise his Gospel; he takes it away from them; he orders his ministering servants to preach no more to them; no more to tell them of the good news of life and salvation by him: thus he dealt with the Jews who contradicted and blasphemed and judged themselves or by their conduct made themselves appear to be unworthy of the words of eternal life; he took away the kingdom of God or the Gospel from them and sent it among the Gentiles: and thus he threatened the church of Ephesus for leaving its first love to remove the candlestick out of its place in case of non-repentance; and a grievous judgment it is upon a place and people when God commands the clouds to rain no rain upon them, [Isaiah 5:6](#); or, in other words when he enjoins his ministers no more to tell, or publish his Gospel to them; he determining to withdraw from them and have no more to do with them; so Christ and his disciples departed from this place, declared in the following verse.

*[Which, incidentally, says in pertinent part **And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi: . . .**” (Mark 8:27).]*

So, from this innocuous but mysterious closing verse of our text, we are reminded of that general concept that we often express and have at some level experienced, i.e. that the time does arrive – and will arrive – when the people of God are expressly enjoined from preaching at certain places because of the antipathy and outright rejection displayed by the residents of such places towards God and his truth.

So let us look forward and take comfort in this wonderful, brief story of the healed blind man. The time comes when we shall see all clearly. The night is far spent; the day is at hand. Let us be content to wait, watch, work and pray. When the day of the Lord comes, that is to say when our mighty Redeemer returns in power and glory, our spiritual eyesight will be perfected and we will see clearly. I love you. Amen!